

## Information to Share

"We're not an ivory tower operation," said NIEHS director Kenneth Olden, recently describing the mission of his institute. "We're not doing science for science's sake, or for intellectual stimulation." Olden points out that the central mission of the NIEHS is research and training for prevention and intervention of environmentally related disease and dysfunction. "A key part of that," he emphasizes, "is communicating our results to the American people."

Olden says that the NIEHS is concerned with moving research results from the laboratory to the bedside for clinical applications, to the work site, or to public health policy forums as quickly as possible. "Unless information from our laboratories and our scientists is accessible to a wider public, NIEHS cannot fulfill its mission," he said. To that end, the NIEHS has worked to develop a number of communication channels to ensure that the public, the scientific community, and federal agencies have ready access to information on environmental health.

People with questions about air pollution, lead toxicity, Lyme disease, radon, drinking water, and scores of other subjects can contact EnviroHealth, a clearinghouse of information dedicated to providing answers to these questions. Since beginning operations in October 1994, EnviroHealth (operated by Information Ventures, Inc., and funded by the NIEHS) has fielded 3,485 calls, and in one month alone mailed out 1,176 fact sheets to callers. Calls have come from as far away as Germany, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand. People inside the United States can access EnviroHealth by calling a toll free number, mailing an inquiry, or by using electronic mail. Typical questions are Does environment play a role in breast cancer? What are the health effects of dioxin and where does it come from? and What is known about the health effects of electromagnetic fields from power lines and from home electrical appliances such as electric blankets? If the staff at EnviroHealth don't know the answer, they try to provide the caller with access to someone who does.

People with access to the Internet can scan the NIEHS gopher server located at [gopher.niehs.nih.gov](http://gopher.niehs.nih.gov), and the NIEHS homepage located at URL: <http://www.niehs.nih.gov> on the World Wide Web for information on a variety of institute research programs and publications (see EHPnet, p. 15).

Detailed information about the National Toxicology Program, its research, and programs is available

from the NTP Liaison Office at the NIEHS. The Central Data Management office of the NIEHS also provides copies of NTP Technical Reports on hundreds of animal studies on chemicals of environmental concern, as well as copies of the *Biennial Report on Carcinogens*, a Congressionally mandated publication.

Information about NIEHS research and training grants can be obtained from the Division of Extramural Research and Training. Any questions not answered through one of the above pathways may also be directed to the NIEHS Office of Communications. "We serve the entire American public," Olden said. "Physicians, public health officials, educators, regulators, industry, the media, scientists . . . we are here for virtually everyone with an environmental question or concern."

## Breaking into the Field

Taking a creative approach to fostering the careers of minority scientists was one of the recommendations of an NIEHS-sponsored task force on the advancement of minorities in science. The NIEHS Division of Extramural Research and Training (DERT) responded to this recommendation recently with an innovative workshop format, which provided a hands-on learning environment for a dozen young minority doctorates and addressed many of the career challenges facing young investigators today.

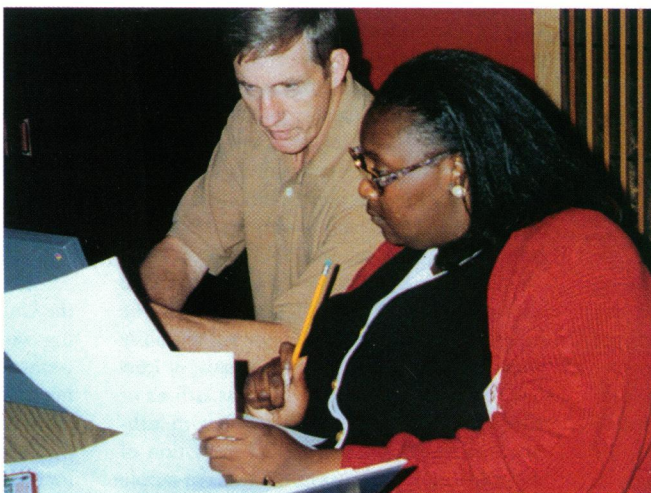
Scientists from universities around the country who are supported by NIEHS grants received two days of intensive sessions on August 28 and 29 at the NIEHS that focused on career opportunities in environmental health sciences, applying for research grants through the National Institutes of Health, positions and funding available through the private sector, and related topics

of immediate concern to post-doctoral professionals.

In her keynote remarks, DERT Director Anne Sassaman related the NIEHS training goal of attracting competitive minority scientists to careers in environmental health science to address the health problems that may disproportionately affect minorities and lower socioeconomic groups. The workshop was seen by NIEHS officials as a critical first step in achieving that goal. NIEHS Director Kenneth Olden encouraged the scientists to enjoy and pursue knowledge in the best institutions and research environments and to spend as many as five years to establish their research credentials.

The NIEHS workshop was a departure from the traditional didactic approach used to instruct young scientists in grant writing and was designed around a framework of DERT staff and extramural scientists working one-on-one with the participants to help them develop their research proposal skills. Participants were required to submit a skeleton grant application. Each participant then had the opportunity to apply instructions and guidance given to them by senior extramural scientists, industry representatives, and expert consultants to their own research projects and to receive immediate feedback on their applications. Team presentations by DERT staff highlighted specific examples of good and bad hypotheses, development of specific aims, and how general directions about writing research proposals are applied in "real life" situations. Presentations by outside experts from such organizations as Procter & Gamble, Weinberg Consulting Group, and the National Institute of General Medicine explained details of how industry and government handle grant applications.

Due to the success of this workshop and the positive reaction of the participants to the new approach, the NIEHS is planning to continue them. The ultimate success of this workshop, however, will be judged by the success of these young scientists and increases in the numbers of minority scientists contributing to the field of environmental health.



**Advancing achievement.** The Division of Extramural Research and Training is encouraging minority scientists to enter careers in environmental health.